

USAR_J-04_Isamu_Nakahama

04:09:42:06 Thank you for coming today.

04:09:49:02 Please tell us your name and your date of birth.

04:09:52:16 My name is Isamu Nakahama. My birthday is August, 8th Showa 4th.

04:10:20:17 When you were in elementary school, what did you play with your friends?

04:10:28:18 In elementary school, I played baseball, specifically throwing and catching soft balls. Also, we played a game known as kick-the-can which involved kicking an aluminum can at the school playground or in my neighborhood streets. Walking on stilts was another childhood activity, which is still common today.

04:11:09:20 I also enjoyed historical plays back then so we got together and played sword fights, pretending to kill and die, while counting the number of revivals. These were some of the games I played.

04:11:44:03 In your childhood, were there any songs you listened to or games that you played that were related to America?

04:11:51:18 Nothing in particular.

04:12:20:05 Did you see any soldiers in your neighborhood before the Pearl Harbor attack in Showa 16th.

04:12:30:05 There were people who were called up to the draft during the time. I saw many women wearing aprons who were praying at a shrine with some soldiers.

04:12:46:02 Was this after the war started?

04:12:48:02 No, I saw them before the war started?

04:12:50:09 Around Showa 15th?

04:12:52:10 Yes, around Showa 15th.

04:13:01:21 What kind of things did people do to show respect for the emperor?

04:13:05:12 I don't know if you call this respect but there was an event at the my elementary school just before the greeting and instructions from the principal. We gathered inside the school auditorium. The curtains opened on center stage where the emperor's portrait, called goshinei, was displayed, and we all made deep bows toward it in his honor.

04:13:54:06 Were there any radios or newspapers in your house before the Pearl Harbor attack on Showa 16th?

04:14:04:04 I don't really read newspapers, and we didn't have a radio back then in the house. There were some in the neighborhood, but people were listening to baseball game broadcasts, so I don't recall hearing any information regarding Pearl Harbor.

04:14:24:14 About how many people around you had their own radios?

04:14:31:14 Do you mean the amount of radios there were in the neighborhood?

04:14:34:08 Yes. For instance, one out of how many people?

04:14:37:02 Like how many there were?

04:14:38:15 Yes.

04:14:38:23 Maybe two or three households had them, but there were very few. It was rare if people owned one during that time.

04:15:06:03 Where did you receive information regarding the Pearl Harbor?

04:15:14:00 We had a morning assembly in 6th grade, and I recall when the school principal got on the platform, and he told us that Japan had declared war against United States. I don't remember hearing the word "Pearl Harbor" itself.

04:15:52:05 How did you feel about going to war against the United States, and fighting against the United States?

04:16:01:09 I don't remember any specifics. I was still little, so I didn't bear any emotions toward the declaration. I just came to the realization that war was about to begin. That was about it.

04:16:31:20 Do you remember anything that your parents told you about going to war against the United States?

04:16:39:04 My parents rarely talked about the war. Nothing related to United States. They were saying things like "This is war," while reading the newspaper, but I don't remember it very clearly.

04:17:35:17 I'm assuming that you started working as a trainee in a factory beginning from March after the year of Pearl Harbor attempt. Can you elaborate on the environment of these factories, and what it was like living in these places?

04:17:55:21 I was at Kobe (city in Japan) during that time. There was a railroad factory nearby my house, specializing in the manufacture of trains. There was one right by my house.

04:18:18:18 Back then I was living in a dorm called Wakataka Dorm located near a river, with other kids around the age of fourteen or fifteen. We went to the factories and studied about different machines, which at times were very confusing and incomprehensible. We also learned about the jobs that were to be performed at the different worksites.

04:18:48:10 Then after lunch, we went to the assigned worksites. The place where I went was a forge where I burned red-hot iron and assisted in the manufacture of springs that were attached to the trains. It was an extremely hot place.

04:19:17:10 And once we got back to the dorms, we would listen to harsh lectures from my seniors.

04:19:36:18 Did you enjoy working there?

04:19:40:08 Not really. Everyone was assigned to varying workplaces. For example some were assigned to carpentry work. There were many different types of work at the sites. Everyone had their own jobs, so I was very reluctant to go to work. It was very hot and required demanding labor. They made us carry heavy iron as well. But it was unavoidable, and I went through the process unwillingly.

04:20:28:03 You have mentioned that your seniors were strict on the lowerclassmen, but what kind of strict disciplinary acts were enforced by them?

04:20:34:20 "Move more." "Start working." Things of those nature. They wouldn't provide us any time to rest. They wouldn't offer any places for us to sit down even for a quick break, just perpetual orders to keep working. It was harsh training.

04:21:01:13 And once we got back to the dorms, the seniors would lecture to us about working hard at the sites, with arrogance. They had gone through the same kinds of treatments from their seniors, which was the principal reason that propelled them to treat us in such harsh manners.

04:21:17: 21 They often times suggested that the military had even more ruthless conditions and tried to imitate it by creating a strict and harsh environment like that of a military.

04:21:28:20 Did they use any violence?

04:21:31:09 If one person slacked off cleaning the restroom, they exclaimed that it was a collective responsibility and punished us all even if we weren't the ones responsible for the assigned task. The seniors lined us up at the dining room on the wooden floor, told us to close our eyes, and slapped us while saying that the soldiers endure through harsher punishments.

04:21:58:10 The same happened when we were slow to gather in the dining room for meal time. Even for something very subtle or insignificant, they gathered us in the dining room and made us sit straight on our heels.

04:22:11:10 They wrapped guetres around our legs, which was awfully painful. When one person made a mistake, it was a collective responsibility and everyone was subsequently punished. It was dreadful. It was known as the "Wakataka Dorm of Hell." Even at the worksites, the seniors were arrogant. It was that kind of a time period.

04:22:46:17 When you were little, did you ever think about becoming a soldier?

04:22:52:09 Yes I thought about joining because it looked very cool. But when I was a child, I didn't really think about becoming a soldier. I thought about growing up to be a distinguished employee at some company or a businessman.

04:23:16:08 As I grew older, some of my friends took preparatory courses to join the navy, which I thought was very cool and inspired me to consider this field. But many of them died during war and now that I think about it, it was a right decision to not join. I was simply attracted to their appearances.

04:23:40:14 During what time period did you dream about joining the military?

04:23:42:14 About Showa 16th or 17th. It was an attractive profession.

04:24:12:06 Did you ever see military ships at the Kobe harbor?

04:24:19:00 No I didn't see any. There weren't any.

04:24:40:02 Did you give up or saw anyone around you give up any personal belongings like jewelry or metallic substances to the government to help with the war?

04:24:55:03 Like giving up your own belongings?

04:24:57:19 Yes your own belongings such as metallic substances.

04:24:59:17 Metal? No we didn't give up anything. We didn't have anything precious in the first place.

04:25:24:00 I heard that you witnessed a B-29 at night on March of Showa 20th. Can you elaborate on that experience?

04:25:35:21 When I went outside at night, the sky was filled with American airplanes, and I watched them fly by with my neighbors. I was impressed by the beauty of the airplanes that were colored red.

04:26:03:00 What direction did they go?

04:26:06:01 I was at Hyogo Prefecture and the airplanes appeared from the direction of Awajishima. (an island in Hyogo Prefecture)

04:26:20:10 Did they appear headed to Tokyo?

04:26:22:08 No, I don't think it was headed to Tokyo. It was coming towards the Kansai region (western region of Japan). It was on March of Showa 20th when Tokyo was bombed. I was relieved that our house wasn't bombed, but it later burned down to ashes on June 5th when we were attacked by grenades.

04:27:03:04 I was injured. I had my personal belongings in the air-raid shelter back in my dorm, and I was worried that my brand new clothes had been burned. If I didn't go back, I wouldn't have gotten injured. I jumped into the river when the bombs dropped, and the water instantaneously turned into hot water.

04:27:31:12 Once I got out of the river, I ran inside the tunnel where the freight trains passed by above. This was where I injured myself when little fragments flew at me after a small bomb landed nearby. Many people passed away.

04:27:57:11 Everything burned down. I found myself lying on the floor when I was blown away by the blast from the bombs, with fragments of the grenade scattered everywhere. Many people died. I thought I was dead, and the remaining people ran over the deceased bodies.

04:28:51:18 I heard that after you escaped and avoided the bombing, you were pulled out of a tunnel by someone. Can you elaborate on this story and the injuries you sustained?

04:29:09:22 The tunnel caught on fire. I was wearing work clothes and it was sticking to my body, while I bled all over my body. I injured myself here when a fragment penetrated my skin. I couldn't move either. The next I thing I knew, I found myself at the garden of the factory being carried with a stretcher.

04:29:49:14 Can you tell us about the story when you were pulled out of a tunnel? Were you pulled out from somewhere you were hiding?

04:30:00:08 What?

04:30:00:18 Were you hiding somewhere?

04:30:06:02 Hiding?

04:30:07:02 Yes. Near the river?

04:30:09:00 Oh yes. What do you call it again? Everyone escaped inside a water pipe, while people tried to pull out the people before them to ensure their own safety. The grenade kept falling. It was hot. Very hot. I couldn't help it but to get out from the river and I darted toward the tunnel.

04:30:48:08 Then a small bomb fell behind me and fragments came flying at me and struck me in the butt. The next I thing I know, I found myself at the garden of the factory being carried with a stretcher. My parents didn't know where I was. They figured out my whereabouts three or four days later when they came to the factory, and there was a label indicating that I was severely hurt. There were other people hurt as well.

04:31:19:23 My father was astonished. Then the people from the factory placed me in a car and took me to Tetsutori Hospital in Osaka (city in Japan). When I woke up, there was a label that said "Operation Room." I was placed on a big platform. After that I couldn't do anything because I was undergoing an operation.

04:31:55:15 Most of my friends passed away. Many were burned severely. Fortunately for me, I was only injured and managed to survive. My face was alright, but I was injured here and in my butt.

04:32:14:08 The hospital was scary. At night there were red alerts, so they turned off all the lights. After the blackout, the elevators wouldn't function so the nurse carried me hastily to the basement with a stretcher. The wound on my butt was extremely painful. It was inconvenient that the elevator was turned off. From then on, we had these red alerts everyday. I was longing for the war to end at the hospital

04:32:59:11 Then my grandmother came to visit me, and she cooked me food outside in the hospital garden. I was frightened by the terror of war but before I knew it, the war ended on August 15th. I was extremely relieved to be finally liberated from the fears of war. I was just glad that the war was over. I still remember that feeling vividly. I never want to go to war again. I don't want them to go to war again.

04:33:43:12 Being in the hospital was very terrifying. Since I was unable to move, it made it even more horrifying. "What would happen if the hospital was bombed?" These feelings crossed my mind constantly. My grandmother was extremely terrified as well.

04:34:15:01 You mentioned earlier that you injured yourself after the bombing. Do you recall anything about the surrounding people? Do you remember seeing anyone injured or suffering?

04:34:28:02 Yes. Many people burned to death right before my eyes. Majority of the people passed away. Similarly, at the hospital, I saw many people suffering from being severely burned on their faces. I think it was a miracle that I was able to survive. My peers, all with shaved heads around the age of fifteen or sixteen, were burned as well. Again, I was very fortunate that I managed to survive.

04:35:25:09 How did your parents survive during the bombing raid?

04:35:32:21 I was injured, so I actually didn't know what was going on at my house. Before I knew it, they came to visit me at the Osaka hospital after a week had surpassed from sustaining the injury.

04:35:46:12 My father and mother brought me white rice inside a lunchbox, knowing that I hadn't eaten for a long time. It was delicious white rice. I devoured it because I was starving to death. It was very grateful. I never realized how tasty something simple as white rice could be; it was a gratifying moment.

04:36:44:06 Were you afraid or scared that the Americans were possibly invading Japan?

04:36:56:00 I heard some things from people around me. I heard things like women were going to be targeted. But I personally didn't have those feelings. They're all stories that I heard from other people. People were afraid that women and children were the first ones to be under attack. Again, this is what I heard from other people, but I never felt that way.

04:37:47:22 When did you first hear about the bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

04:37:56:04 I don't recall it clearly, but I'm guessing it was a while after the event. I don't remember the exact date. It was a while after.

04:38:15:00 A couple of years after? Or was it a couple of months?

04:38:16:09 It was probably after two or three years after the bombing. At first, I didn't know anything, so I'm guessing it was about two years after.

04:38:49:04 What do you remember about air-raid drills, blackouts, or gas masks during war?

04:39:00:12 I don't remember anything about gas masks, but I do remember turning off all lights at night and having a blackout. People alerted me to turn off all lights when the Americans were attacking, and we covered the light bulbs with black cloths. We also practiced filling up buckets with water and extinguishing the fire when the bombs dropped. We lined up, filled buckets with water, and threw it at the fire.

04:40:02:19 Were you scared during the blackouts?

04:40:06:22 What?

04:40:07:18 Were you scared when you turned off the lights during blackouts?

04:40:11:06 The blackouts? Yes it was a peculiar feeling. I was a little anxious. Of course, if they made it too dark I wouldn't be able to see anything or eat, so it made me uneasy. I just hoped that we could get away without having to live in the dark. But it was unavoidable. It had to be done to ensure our safety.

04:40:07:02 What did you think about the fire extinguishing drill?

04:40:54:08 I doubted that a bucket-full of water was enough to extinguish the fire. But they forced us to do it, so I went through the process reluctantly. I felt that a huge fire was inextinguishable with just a bucket of water.

04:41:34:06 Do you have any final thoughts about your experience of World War II? And how you feel about the experience today?

04:41:55:19 In any case, war was scary, frightful, and dreadful. I simply wished that it never happened in the first place. This feeling crossed my mind frequently. "Why do I have to go through fear and misery, running around in hopes of surviving?" I couldn't help feeling uneasy about my everyday life. It was better not to go to war. That pretty much sums it all.

04:43:18:13 Should I look at the lenses?

04:43:29:14 I like taking pictures.